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Subject: The Central Principle of Character.

# PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

# SERMONS

PREACHED BY

## HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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### CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

I. The Duty of Using One's Life for Others. II. The God of Comfort. III. The Nobility of Confession. IV. Self-Control Possible to All. V. Pilate, and his Modern Imitators. VI. The Strong to Bear with the Weak. VII. Growth in the Knowledge of God. VIII. Contentment in all Things. IX. Abhorrence of Evil. X. Privileges of the Christian. XI. The Love of Money. XII. Divine Influence on the Human Soul. XIII. Moral Affinity, the True Ground of Unity. XIV. The Value of Deep Feelings. XV. Works Meet for Repentance. XVI. Malign Spiritual Influences. XVII. The Old and the New. XVIII. The Hidden Christ. XIX. Well-Wishing not Well-Doing. XX. Sphere of the Christian Minister. XXI. Suffering, the Measure of Worth. XXII. The Victory of Hope in Sorrow. XXIII. The Crime of Degrading Men. XXIV. Self-Conceit in Morals. XXV. Morality, the Basis of Piety. XXVI. The Trinity. XXVII. The Family, as an American Institution

### CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

I. The Way of Coming to Christ. II. Conduct, the Index of Feeling. III. The Sympathy of Christ. IV. Retribution and Reformation. V. Counting the Cost. VI. Scope and Function of a Christian Life. VII. Human Ideas of God. VIII. The Graciousness of Christ. IX. Evils of Anxious Forethought. X. The Beauty of Moral Qualities. XI. The Problem of Joy and Suffering in Life. XII. The Apostolic Theory of Preaching. XIII. The Right and the Wrong Way of Giving Pleasure. XIV. The Perfect Manhood. XV. Dissimulating Love. XVI. The Door. XVII. Moral Theory of Civil Liberty. XVIII. Peaceableness. XIX. Soul-Drifting. XX. The Hidden Life. XXI. Discouragements and Comforts in Christian Life. XXII. Hindrances to Christian Development. XXIII. Loving and Hating. XXIV. Authority of Right over Wrong. XXV. The Power of Love. XXVI. The Preciousness of Christ.

### CONTENTS OF VOLUME III.

I. Watchfulness. II. Paul and Demetrius. III. Consolations of the Suffering of Christ. IV. Treasure that Cannot be Stolen. V. Bearing, but not Overborne. VI. The Holy Spirit. VII. Ideal Standard of Duty. VIII. Faults. IX. The Comforting God. X. The Name Above Every Name. XI. National Unity. XII. Social Obstacles to Religion. XIII. Christ, the Deliverer. XIV. The God of Pity. XV. Sin Against the Holy Ghost. XVI. Inheritance of the Meek. XVII. Memorials of Divine Mercy. XVIII. The Victorious Power of Faith. XIX. The Peace of God. XX. Coming to One's Self. XXI. Fragments of Instruction. XXII. The Substance of Christianity. XXIII. Spiritu Blindness. XXIV. Perfect Peace. XXV. Preparation for Death. XXVI. Fidelity to Conviction.

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# THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE OF CHARACTER.

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."—MATT. XIX. 22.

There is no greater contrast than that which exists in the treatment accorded by our Saviour to different persons who approached him. Nor, if we look on the outside, does it seem possible to determine why he should have made such a difference. Certainly, there is every reason why we should have expected that he would have received this young man far more encouragingly than he would such a one as the publican Zacheus, who was confirmed in habit by many years, and was not of a good reputation among his own kind. He held himself, in some sense, aloof, drawn rather by curiosity, apparently, than by aspiration. And yet, Christ came to him, called him down to his side, invited him to his dwelling, and heard his profession of faith, declaring that salvation had come to that house, thus making an overture all the way through.

The young man was amiable, and he was attracted, it is declared, that way. The Saviour looked upon him. And that does not mean that he merely cast his eye toward him, but that he gave him one of those long, fond, gazing looks which indicate affection. He looked lovingly and long upon him. And yet, he drove him away—that is, he prescribed such conditions as amounted to that. And it seems very strange that this one should not have been encouraged, since Christ had encouraged Zacheus. Why was not this young man, who came to Christ with such alacrity that he ran, and who asked the very question of all questions, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and who, upon further conversation, declared that this had been the object of his research from the beginning, and that, according to the light and the teaching which he had had, he had all

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his life long sought to keep the commandments—why was he not encouraged? Why should the Lord have laid this hard condition on him: "Confiscate everything you have, and then follow me"?

You cannot solve this question without solving, also, a very profound question of mental philosophy; and it is a question of such universal reach and significance, that it will constitute the body of my discourse this morning.

This young man was amiable, I have said. His dispositions were admirable. But it was evident that he had laid the foundation of his life and character in his own physical well-being. He had not alone an estate, but great possessions; and it is very plain that he stood on these. That is to say, these were to him the foundation qualities of excellence. Because, the moment the question came, "Which prefer you to have, spiritual excellence or these temporalities?" which admitted of not an hour's or a moment's debate; the moment the question presented itself to him, "Which is better for you, to forsake estate or spiritual possessions?" without any argument or reply at all, he chose his estate. He went away sad. The thing came home to him vividly. He had asked the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and he was an excellent young man; but, after all, his root was in his possessions. There was where he had centered his interest. He meant to have a great deal more than the riches which he had accumulated; but he meant that these should be the foundation of all other things—that other things should be so much in addition. But when Christ, instead of taking him at his word, instead of responding to his statement, that he already had so much good, and to his inquiry as to how he should get more, made a division, and said, "Here are physical and here are spiritual excellencies: take your choice; give up one or the other; which will you have?"—then he saw, as with a beam of light, between the one and the other side, and he chose the physical, the temporal. He was not less amiable; but you will observe that the key-note of his character had been revealed. He had laid the foundation of his life in physical well-being; and when he was called to take something higher, he refused it, and went back to that as to the dominant center of his life.

Not only was this young man willing to have something else, but, we cannot but think, he felt the genuine want of higher qualities in a limited degree. Even bad men have strong impulses toward good. They admire good things. And so, a man may be selfish in a thousand ways—predominantly selfish—and have a very genuine admiration of benevolence. Not only that, a selfish man, I had almost said a man whose purposes are selfish, may be struck

with benevolence. There is a place where benevolence will serve selfishness. I have seen men who were benevolent not only because the impulse was pleasant to them, but because, as they said, they saw clearly that it would work for their benefit to be so. But the fact that it was pleasant to them did not change the character of the selfishness that was in them.

Here was a young man who had a place which satisfied his ambition. As the possessor of a great territory, he had that kind of position in the neighborhood where he belonged which gratified his pride and vanity. He had that control and that indulgence which came from an unlimited command of means according to the nation and the age in which he was living. And this was the substructure of his life. Being possessed of all that could gratify his senses, he did not mean to be over-indulgent in it, but he did not want to give it up. Being in this position, he wanted, not to exchange it for anything else, but simply to have sprouting up around about him, overarching him, and embowering him, flowers of spiritual and poetical aspirations, and all manner of divine feelings, so that he should have both things—his feet rooted in this earth, and his head placed in the other life. He wanted to take this world first, and then superadd the kingdom of God as a polish to it. He wanted all spiritual excellence to sit, as it were, in the clouds above him, like an orchestra, and play sweet music to him, while he sat below, on a level with the earth, sensuous, and indulging himself selfishly.

It is said that these things are not reconcilable. They may not be reconcilable, but they are universal. Men have wanted, in every age, to have both worlds—a thing which Christ said was impossible.

**"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."**

Our Saviour taught this young man that the spiritual life must supplant the physical life. The two can co-exist; but the spiritual life must be in the ascendency, and must control the lower physical life. Our Saviour taught all the way through his life that spirituality cannot be simply the complement of secularity. It cannot be a parasite growing on the boughs of worldly prosperity. If a man is to have the kingdom of God, he must make that first, and that must be supreme. Or, to change it to a more psychological statement, if a man is to be truly a Christian, his spiritual nature must predominate and bear rule over everything else that is in him. You cannot have the temporal, lower nature strongest, and then expect the spiritual nature to please it and play down to it. And yet, that is what men are attempting to bring about everywhere. Every person has some dominant point. There is no uncentered character anywhere. There is a point in every man's character which rules, and to which everything is brought for comparison and settlement.

This point often seems to shift and change; but, after all, there is some point in a man's character which you may say is the dominant point, and before which all things above it and below it have to come into judgment. It is this that gives character to a man, and determines whether he is high or low, good or bad. And it may be said, making the largest generalization, that if you take a man and strike a kind of equatorial line through his character, all below a given point is selfish. And if the center of a man's character is below that point, it may be that he is not selfish on this, that or the other subject; but characteristically and generically he is selfish. Whereas, if the center, the true point of motive-power and control, is above that line, in a man, his character is benevolent and spiritual; and he comes into the general category of Christian men. So that the fact that the controlling element in a man's mind is above or below a certain point, determines whether he is good or bad; whether he is Christian or natural.

A benevolent center, I remark, is quite consistent with some shades of selfishness and pride and evil. That is to say, a man whose nature is centered in benevolence may nevertheless be so far under the controlling influence below, that his benevolent impulses will find themselves mixed up with derivative selfish feelings. Because a man's character is centered in benevolence it does not follow that he is never proud or selfish or worldly; but if he is addicted to selfishness or pride or worldliness, they are casual. They are against the tendency of his nature. They are contrary to his prevailing wish. They are always brought into judgment before his real spiritual purpose. He knows all the time which way his soul points, and which way he means to have it point. He has an aspiration and an ideal, and he knows it perfectly well, and he appeals to God as one who knows that the drift and purpose of his life are benevolent, pure, spiritual. If, contrary to this, he drops here, or drops there, into incidental selfishness and sins, still he checks them and condemns them. So that a man may be a truly benevolent man, though he is not perfectly consistent in carrying out the spirit of benevolence in all its details and principles.

On the other hand, a man may have a character centered in selfishness, and yet there may be reaching out from that center a thousand amiable feelings and graces, a thousand excellencies, which do not shift the center. They do not change the dominant influences in the mind. The man has selfishness at the center still, but there are vines growing over it. The selfishness has other and better traits associated with it; but so far as the dynasty is concerned, that is not changed. The tyranny is there yet, though the scepter is wreathed with flowers.

I remember watching, last summer, spiders that burrowed in the crevices of a trellis where the wind had borne much dust. I noticed that the hole where they lay lurking looked dark and ugly. I also noticed, as I sat one day watching, a vagrant spider take a morning glory, in full blossom, and spin his web over the mouth of it. And there never was a prettier nest in this world—a nest more richly gemmed with beauty—than his was. But, after all, it was the same spider, whether he lay in the dark hole at the corner of the trellis, or in the blossom of that exquisite flower.

Now, selfishness may weave its web in the dusky places, or in the hideous-looking recesses of a man's disposition, or about the the mouths of graces and sweet affections; but it is the same selfishness after all. The place is changed, and the appearance of the surroundings is changed, but the spider is not changed.

So, the point to be remembered is, that in every man there is a center around about which his life really swings. There is a balance-point, and it preponderates one way or the other. The great influences of life weigh down toward the flesh, or else they go toward the spiritual. You may change the circumstances of a man's life, and it may be modified one way or the other; but after all there is a predominant force in his character, and that controls all the minor forces.

Again, a selfish-centered man, clothing himself with all manner of Christian graces and aspirations is not to be condemned as if these graces and aspirations were of no account. Here is a point where ministers have trouble in preaching to men. When we see men embowered under external moralities, and attempt to teach that morality is not enough, the impression arises that we undervalue morals. I do not undervalue morals any more than the tax-collector undervalues a hundred dollars, when I go to pay my taxes, and offer him that amount, when my bill is five hundred. He says, "I will not take it. It is not enough." "He does not despise the hundred dollars. He merely says, "You must put more with it." And I do not despise morality because I say that it does not rise high enough. It is good as far up as it goes. So is a grape-vine good as far up as it goes, when it is two or three feet high; but it does not arrive at what it was planted for until it reaches that point where it has blossoms and clusters. It is the cluster that determines its value. And in regard to excellencies, a man may be an intensely selfish-centered man, almost all his inspirations may be from this world, the dominant influence in him may always sway him, he may live for the sight of his eye, and the hearing of his ear, and the gratification of his senses; and yet he may have good qualities, desirable

traits, in his disposition. A man may love poetry and music, and have generous impulses which draw him toward a higher range of life; but after all, it is only a polished form of selfishness, or selfness, that is manifesting itself in him. It is *self* that is at the bottom.

I do not say that it is not better that a man should be refinedly selfish than coarsely selfish. It is a great deal better. It is better that men should be intellectually selfish than coarsely selfish. It makes social intercourse easier. It makes it easier for men to get along with each other. And if the center of a man's disposition is selfish, and at the same time he has aspirations and refinements and generosities and kindnesses, I do not say that he is no better for having these things: I say that as a member of society he is a great deal better. He energizes society. He adds something to those elements which take away attrition and harshness and rudeness from society. But he is not inwardly better; for nothing makes a man better within until the center of his life and character are changed. Every blossom that you put upon a man who is radically selfish, and is going to be selfish, the worse you make it for him. The prettier you make a man's selfishness, the more music there is that accompanies it, the more flowers there are that decorate it, the more balm there is along with it, the more sunlight there is shed upon it, the more it is painted with glowing colors, the better is it for society; but the worse it is for him, because these things delude; because they are satisfying; because they hide the mischief; because they do not let him see what an unforgivable and what a demoralizing quality selfishness is.

Whatever change, therefore, comes upon a man, must not be in the nature of polish. It must not consist of the addition of this little grace, or that little grace. All changes must be what our Master taught us that they must be.

See how beautiful the life of Christ was. See how much he enjoyed whatever was beautiful in social life. See how he entered into the festivities at Cana of Galilee. See how he met on intimate terms the brothers and sisters at Bethany. See how he was a man among men. See how he came to teach men in respect to their spiritual natures. And see how he struck through all these things when he said,

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

There must be a fundamental change. What is that change? It does not consist in doing a few more things, or in adding a few more excellencies, as the young man thought it did. "Good Master, what

new thing shall I do? What new prayer shall I say? What extra morality shall I take on? What other charities and bounties shall I bestow for man's relief? I should be glad to add to my stock of excellencies." That was the purport of the young man's inquiry. The Master said to him in substance, "Your whole character is wrapped up in your position. You are rich, you have large estates, and you know it, and you stand centered in them. And now, with this center, you want to add various excellencies. Go sell all these, give them away, and take up your cross and follow me." That brought him to a decision instantly. Choosing between the higher and the lower, he took the lower, and went away sad and grieved. And Christ everywhere brought men to this choice. If you are to be Christians, Christianity does not mean having some few things on a selfish basis. You must change the foundation of your life. You must pass over from the animal, up from the lower, away from the predominantly self-seeking life, that is in all of us by nature. You must come into the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of love. Beneficent love, love for others, and not for yourself, must be the predominant, the governing tendency.

Every man can tell very quick which is the governing motive with him in life. Everywhere this is the condition of salvation according to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to pass from the predominance of selfishness in any and all its forms, and enter into that kingdom in which true benevolence is the law of life and light. Let us illustrate how life is in this matter.

I behold a great many men who are living lives of sensuousness. I am not now speaking of the irreligious; I am not speaking of the outbreaking wicked; I am speaking simply of those who are considered to be respectable, moral and excellent persons. There are a great many who are satisfied with themselves, and who have a hope that they shall be saved by and by, although if you were to make inquisition into their natural life, you would see that they were living with their whole vital force centered in some form of sensuous enjoyment—that is, enjoyment of the senses and of the flesh. It may not be in the violation of custom or law. It may not be in immoderate eating and drinking. It may not be in over-sleeping or overworking. It may constitute the thing on which the man's life is centered.

I can conceive of one whose body is exquisitely formed; to whom health is a matter of luxury; who is full of all the enjoyment which comes from the eye, and from the hands, and from the tongue, and from the ear, and from those sweet solaces of society which do not require too much sentiment and too much sacrifice; but who never

rose higher than elegance of the flesh, and all the sweet amenities of a bodily life kept pure and in tune with nature. I see multitudes of persons who live in about this round of existence. And if you take a census of the opinions respecting them, you will find that they are not considered as evil-doers, nor specially as well-doers, but as *good livers.* It is said that they are happy, joyful, good neighbors. They are pleasant men to go a-fishing with, and to go on a picnic with. They are pleasant men to seek temporary enjoyment with. They neither lie, nor steal, nor swear, nor get drunk. They are not men that slander. They are not envious. They are not jealous. I could go through with a long list of negatives concerning them; and if negatives were virtues, how virtuous they would be! But, after all, the orb of their life rises and sets in a lower sphere.

To be happy within the reach of a sense, living every day for that day, and every hour for that hour; to be happy by having everything around about one so regulated as to make him comfortable and cheerful—this is living in a small range of happiness.

I am speaking of sensuous life in its most respectable form; and if this be wanting, how much more is that life wanting which breaks out in salacious and degrading desires! I take the very top and best, the cream, of sensuous lives; and I say that the whole of such a life is centered in sensuous indulgence; in making one's self happy without regard to the future; without regard to the claims of God and the claims of the whole race of men; without any high idea of manhood; without any other nobility than simply that of being a musical chord which is forever being played on. The eye of men who live such a life is a harp; their stomach is a harp; and whenever it is touched, they want it to be so touched that it shall respond sweet music. A dulcet way of living is their ideal of life. They will go to church, and hear church-music, and go away and say, "Serious things are very important. I am living very happy; but then I would not be understood as not believing in religion. I never hear those solemn organ anthems, and those sermons, that I do not feel that religion is very important." But it does not change the center of their nature. They are living for self. I do not say that they are criminal, or immoral, or beastly: I only say that they are self-seekers; that the end and aim of their life and being is self. And Christ says that *except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

I behold a great many men in life who have sought, and rightly sought, riches, and have earned them, and held them, and used them; and I believe it is possible, as Christ taught his disciples, for

a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, if God helps him. *With God all things are possible*, it is declared. But let me see a man conforming to society, conforming to morality, conforming to all decorous and just usages, who stands in the midst of a great possession, called to choose between that and his true spiritual good, and then I can determine whether that man is living in the lower sphere —below the equatorial line—in a common selfishness; or whether he is living in the higher sphere—above that line.

I hear men say, sometimes, "I do not care for riches. It is not the money that I care for. It is the excitement of getting it. Wealth is the key that opens almost every door; it is a source of power; and I like power." I have heard men who drank talk, in the same strain, saying, "I do not like liquor: it is the excitement that I like."

It is true, usually, that it is not the flavor of money that men like, but that which money brings. It is only now and then that there is one that loves money for its own sake. It is what it does, and what it yields, it is the effect which it produces on pride and vanity, it is the sensuous enjoyment which is derived from it, that is understood when we speak of *the love of money.*

Now, if a man has wealth, and he holds it as a man holds a mental faculty, all of it consciously dedicated to the uses of God; if he himself is God's; if being an artist, all his power of genius is God's, conscientiously held and conscientiously administered, not for self-seeking, but for the highest ends, then not only is the man in the way to be saved in the kingdom of God, but wealth becomes a mighty factor of righteousness and a power for God.

But suppose a man holds wealth, and suppose it is in this wealth that his ambition is, and his pride is, and his life is? You may touch him all round, and you will touch that. It is the center of his being. When you touch that you touch the marrow. When you touch him in his wealth you have got home.

You may lop off a man's hand, and he lives; you may take off his arm at the shoulder, and he can live; you may remove a good deal of the trunk, and he still can live; but there is a point which you cannot touch without his dropping dead. So in a man's nature you can go round and touch this and that element and not hurt him; but by and by you come to a point which you cannot touch without touching the center of his existence.

There are multitudes of men who live moral lives, generous lives, lives that are good in a thousand respects; but it does not come to this, that their whole being is centered in God and spiritual things. It is centered, rather, in the possession of wealth. There is where

their might and power lie. There is where all the great passions of their nature come together to a focus, so that if their wealth is taken away they have nothing left.

I do not say that they are sinful because they have money; neither do I say that they are not good according to the standard by which men judge of goodness; but as before God, and touching this question as to where a man's character is to be, I say that when one's whole nature is centered in wealth he cannot enter the kingdom of God. He must be born again, and come to a higher level, a new center, or he cannot be saved.

These are solemn truths. When so many young men are stretching out their hands for wealth; when so many young men are planning to make their fortune; when so many young men are longing for this bright, blissful, golden center, it is a very solemn thing for a man to become honestly rich, and yet lose his soul because his riches are the center of his very life. The allegation is not that the young man made a bad use of his wealth: he doubtless made a kind, good-natured use of it. The point is that God demands that a man's central life shall be spiritual, and not low down in the things of the flesh.

I perceive the same thing to exist in men in the matter of self-worship. Pride and conceit and self-seeking are not confined to the flesh. They are the curse of the intellect. They are the curse, also, of the imagination. Selfishness in geniuses, among poets and artists, is not only wicked, but, alas! too common. Rich men do not serve themselves with their riches any more selfishly than men of genius serve themselves with their genius. Do they not make their own enjoyment the very center of their ambition? Do not they gather around about them applause? Do they not endeavor to excite admiration? Do they not live in the enjoyment of their understanding? Their treasures of knowledge, their eloquence, their poetry, their fictile skill, their affirmative power—these are elements of selfishness in the higher range of faculties. And if there is any discrimination, Christ uttered his most terrible denunciations against those, all of whose higher endowments were used for selfish purposes. And I say to every man who is living clean, and arrogating to himself great safety because he never indulges his lower appetites and passions, that however pure his outward life may be, unless his life is centered on divine things, he must be born again before he can enter the kingdom of God.

Do I make it plain to you why Christ spoke as he did? Do you understand what he meant in some degree when he said that every man must be changed? Do you understand that it is not implied

that every man is necessarily a villain and a culprit according to human ideas? Do you understand that a man may be living with many decencies, many virtues, many good qualities, many notable excellencies, and yet be supremely worldly and selfish? Do you understand that a man may, as it were, explore the whole realm of beauty, purity and truth, and bring down wreaths of flowers to make the selfish home of his soul more beautiful and more secure, and that after all no man can have hope of salvation except he, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, shall change the center of his life from that of selfishness to that of true beneficence? The fact that a man lives, not for himself, but for God and his fellow men—that it is which makes a man salvable. And every man must come to this change—the highest and the lowest. Some show more obviously than others the need of it, but all need it, and all die if they do not have it. It is this which is the passport into the spirit-land. Without this there can be no entrance there. For the whole universe is divided by that line of which I have spoken. Above are those who live for a larger benevolence, and beneath are those who live for some form of self-seeking. They grade all the way down; and they grade all the way up. More and more glorious are they as they rise to greater beneficence, to more marvelous forms of self-denial, to an ineffable power by which one is enabled to make himself lighter and brighter and stronger and happier, and to bow down and serve with more remarkable delicacies of life.

These are the things which give exaltation in heaven. Men do not go up there by stature, or magnitude, or radiance, or anything that you can enumerate. It is the ingenuity, the wondrous power, of the heart; it is the ineffable disclosures of what the heart filled with the fire of love can do, that makes men princes and angels and archangels in the heavenly land.

From the lowest depths of the greatest animalism to the twilight line, above the point of refinements and moralities and specious beauty, every man is to pass. He must make a transition from that state in which his life is bent supremely on self, to that state in which his life is bent on holy things. The impulses of his life must be changed. Every man must undergo a change before he can pass into the great throng of the salvable ones. *He must be born again.*

The number of those who have had serious thoughts in this congregation is very great. After a shower in the night, if you go out in the morning, it is scarcely safe for you to go near a bush or a tree, because if you touch it, there will rain down such multitudes of drops on you. I sometimes think this church is like a tree that

has stood out in the open air, and collected the dew. Every leaf is covered with it. If you shake the tree, down come a shower of drops. I see you moved to tears every Sunday. I know that you follow and enjoy the service of prayer and of song and of preaching. You have much deep religious feeling, and a great deal of thought. The pews are full of young men and young women who are going to Christ and saying, "Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Christ says, by me, to-day, to every one of you, "It is not adding one good thing to another that you need, but that you should rise from the center of selfishness, and go over to the center of true divine benevolence, by the power of the Holy Ghost, without which power no man can rise to the higher level."

You are to find a new heart (for that is what is meant), a new center, a new point of life, so that all motives, all purposes, all aspirations shall spring from a higher point, a new judgment-seat, new tests, new measurements, laws and requisitions. For *if any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.* This is the doctrine, the Gospel, of to-day. O blessed light! O glorious emancipation!

*Ye must be born again.* It seems to me that if you but knew what that upper life is, what it works toward, what its joys are, how sweet it is here and all the way up, and especially beyond, it would not be needful for me to say, "Ye must be born again." You with uplifted hands and clamorous lips would say, "May we not be born again; may we not be crowned."

It is the most blessed invitation that ever was issued. It is an emancipation from the lingering animal life that belongs to each in this mortal sphere. Being born of the dust, going up by natural evolutions and growths, coming to the line of the animal, passing that, and going still higher, there is a point of transition by which we are to go into another kingdom, a higher creation. By the Holy Ghost we are to be enfranchised, changed, lifted up, to that other kingdom. Then we become God's sons, and are no longer strangers and foreigners, and no longer wanderers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but are brought home by the power of love, convoyed by the power of the Spirit, led by the light of truth out of the old paths and into the new, where we live for love and beneficence. And this blessed invitation is addressed to every one of you.

There are many of you who think you are Christians. I believe many of you are, though imperfectly so. But I fear that many of you are not. Are you a Christian because you were baptized in your

childhood? It is not in the power of water, but in the power of the Holy Ghost, to change you. Are you a Christian because you observe days and ordinances? These things ought ye to have done, but the other and higher life of salvation—what of that? Are you Christians because you are orthodox in the Catechism and in the Creed? Nay, Creeds and Cathechisms are simply educating instruments. They are merely school-books by which God teaches you how to live a higher and nobler life. Where is the sensitive point in you? Where is the governing force in you? Where is the center of your life and character?

Would it not be a good thing for every one of you, Christian brethren, to go home to-day and look into the simple question, Where does my life center? Where do my roots enter and issue? What am I? Am I wholly for God, and for the eternal and spiritual world, or am I for sense and for this world? It is a very solemn, it is a very searching, and it will prove a very profitable question.

To those of you who are out of the church, as well as to those that are in the church, I come to say,

**"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."**

You must be born again. You must be born of water and of the Spirit. No man here is better than Nicodemus was, and yet to no other one more than to him did Christ press home this searching annunciation, *Ye must be born again.*

May God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, bring this matter home to you. Ye that have been looking wistfully toward a religious life; ye that have been hoping yet one day to be gathered into the Church of Christ, may God lead you to look up to Jesus himself, to see the secret of his sweet life, and to understand the mystery of his self-renunciation, his emptying himself of all reputation, that he might bow down to the weak and the sinful, and save them by the might of his own nature. May God give you that self-emptying disposition, and make you understand the secret of being made happy by what you give, and not by what you receive. May God bring you through this self-renunciation into that new birth of life and truth and holiness which shall make you the very children of God!

## PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Forever blessed be thy name, O Lord God most high, most holy. Far above the reach of our understanding thou dwellest. Our sense is not open to discern thee; nor is there that goodness in us, like thine, by which we can interpret thee. Some slender experiences have we as children and as parents. Some light and lore of love, and its patience and disinterestedness and purifying joy, we have; but who of us can rise into the flame of thy being, and dwell in thoughts with thee? Thou art a consuming fire. If we carry up our lower affections, if we carry that up which is within us of hopefulness, how little can it find to interpret in thee! And how is the dread purity of thy nature flaming forth against selfishness and all corruption in us! And how are we seared before thine eyes as before a living flame! We rejoice that thou hast been pleased to make this manifest to us through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that we can draw near to him feeling that we are drawing near to thee, that we discern the divine disposition, that we know the divine thought and heart, and that all his words and all his ways are the Divine let down in mortal form, so that except through him we cannot draw near to thee, nor understand thee, nor rejoice in thee, nor come into personal relation of sympathy with thee; though through him we know thee, and rejoice in thee, and take hold with our hearts and hands upon thee.

And now we beseech of thee that thou wilt open our understandings that we may discern the things which are in Christ Jesus our Lord. May we come into such sympathy with him that we shall interpret, by the power given us in the Holy Spirit, in him, the greater truths of thy realm, and enter upon them, and live in them, that our life may be hid with Christ in God. Thou art drawing us. Even as the sun, though it be winter, is calling to all things, and by his light and warmth is prevailing upon the hidden things to come forth; so art thou shining even in our winter; so art thou proclaiming summer over our death; so wouldst thou by the Holy Spirit shine, O Sun of righteousness, into our hearts, and bring forth all sweet and pleasant things. Grant that there may rise up out of us to-day that which shall please thee—such budding desires, such fragrant love and gladness, such joy in the Holy Ghost, as shall make us acceptable in thy sight.

But behold how these tender things are overlaid. We are as seeds that seek to grow from beneath mighty stones which are rolled upon them. And even when they have found their way out with crooked growth and struggling, how laborious and how painful is it for them to grow, and how imperfectly do they come forth! And see how, in the overlaying of care, in the operations of the world, in the dominion of our passions, the things which are good in us, nourished and watered by thy good Spirit, still grow feebly, and blossom more feebly, and bring forth almost no fruit. Be pleased, O Lord God, to interfere in this struggle with us; for we cannot control ourselves as of ourselves. We have light both in the understanding and in the will. We do discern the things which are right, and we resolve with our power to do the things which are right; and yet, how impossible we find it to hold ourselves to the settled convictions of each hour! How do we drift! How do we slumber, and forget, and change in our moods, and come round again to the same battle; to the same penitence; to the same fixed purpose, alas! to revolve again; to the same backsliding and disaster! And so, while our days should be marches in the new upcast road on which ever ransomed ones do walk, we are moving in a circle, and repeating our experiences. We are seeking the things that are good, and almost gaining them, losing our grasp, slumbering, and waking again. And so our life worries itself. As the chafing tides come and go, mourning and complaining against the rock and against the sand, so our thoughts do evermore complain and mourn.

O Lord our God, this is thy work in us. We feel, in every member, in all our desires, in every aspiration, and we see yet more when we look upon the fullness of our life and of our nature, how complicate is all that which thou art leading us to be and to do. We feel the need of that shining, of that intersphering, all-powerful influence which thou dost give. And if there be the clouds which passion sends up, and which hide between thee and any soul, O grant that there may come some sweet wind from heaven to drive them quite away, that the light of thy glory may shine into that struggling soul. If there be those who, consciously proud, do not desire that thy Spirit shall rule over them, strike thou in this battle for them. If there are those who are conscious that they are living for their lower and their passional nature, and who desire to escape from this thrall, and to rise to the higher realm of holy and sweet and pure desires, O strike for them in the battle which they wage. If there are those who are bound fast by avarice, and by all the ties which come with the throes and with the vicissitudes of the earthly struggle, grant that, feeling their need of divine help, they may find thy hand smiting down their enemies and strengthening their blows in the day of battle. Grant, we beseech of thee, if there are any who are consciously beguiled and misled into ten thousand insidious ways, that they may have vigilance, watchfulness and courage to the very end, to overcome their easily besetting sin. And we pray, if there are those who are consciously desiring a better life, who are consciously desiring to live for God, but who yet are unwilling to let go of themselves, that thou wilt reveal the truth to them to-day. Make them to understand what they are, where they stand, and what ails them. May they see their souls as thou dost. May they have grace given them to forsake all, that they may come to thee. And though they come as little children, with all their life to live over again, and all their habits to be refashioned, and all their soul to be formed anew, still may they come and accept the kingdom of God. And we pray that thou wilt have great mercy upon them. Thou that didst have mercy upon the dying thief, and didst comfort and encourage him to the last moment; thou that didst comfort the forsaken and the fallen. Thou that didst speak even unto the publican, and bring salvation to his household; thou that wouldst not cast away the Syrophenician, the outcast and the heathen, but didst listen to their prayers, and grant the needed blessing, wilt thou refuse when thy children call to thee? When they are tempted, and carried away captive often and often, and come again with tears, only to be carried again away, and come back again to mourn before thee, wilt thou not at last fix them in the blissful center of thy love, so that they shall abide with thee; so that there shall be trophies of thy grace in the midst of this people?

We pray that thou wilt comfort those who have found the way to God, and who know the peace which there is under the shadow of his wings. From out of this covert may they invite others. Forbid that there shall be a spiritual self-indulgence, and that men shall come to thee only to make themselves more happy. May they come for power and for light. May they come that they may be like thee, and that they, in turn, may bring others; so that all, receiving freely, may give forth freely.

We pray that thou wilt bless our Sabbath-schools and our Bible classes. And bless those who teach in them, that they may be filled with the very gentleness and purity and patience and forbearance of Christ Jesus. And may they not stand above those who are committed to their charge, demanding them to come up to them, but may they know how to do as thou didst; how to go down to the poor, not only in an outward way, but in their thoughts and feelings; how to lay aside their comfort and their selfishness to accept them in all their poverty, and lowliness, and sins, and ugliness of disposition; and how to be to them, according to the measure of human power,

what thou art to them as teachers according to the measure of thy divine power. And so may we learn how it is that thou dost bear the sins and carry the sorrows of the world. May we learn how to bear each other's infirmities; how to attemper our life so as to shield the infelicities of their lives. May we learn how to live, not for ourselves, but in the kingdom of love; how to live full of self-sacrifice, and for the joy thereof; how to live full of labors, that we may have that divine rest of which thou hast taught us.

And now, O Lord, we pray that thou wilt teach thy Church. Grant that the day of its divisions may cease; that the day of its conflicts may have an end; that the day of harmony may come; that men who love Christ may love one another, and not vex each other, and distract each other's forces by the way. Overrule all causes of jealousy, all mischiefs, all evil surmisings, all stumbling at the truth. And grant that thy kingdom in all the world may be advanced.

O Lord, look upon thy servants who are assembled together in a far distant capital, there, according to their light, to take counsel in regard to the things which pertain to the Church of Christ. Give them a truer light. Move upon their hearts. Oh, that the sweet influence of the Spirit of God, and the presence of Jesus in his simplicity and great love, may be with them, working through them, and overruling them! And by their various instrumentality take out of the way stumbling blocks. And may none be put into the way.

And so, serve thyself and thy cause by every instrumentality—by the high and by the low, by the wise and by the ignorant, by the rich and by the poor. By all means win this lost and dying world back to its allegiance to thee. Let thy kingdom come, let thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit, evermore. *Amen.*

## PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt bless the word of truth which has been spoken. Grant that every one of us may accept it, and understand it, and feel its weight and power. May we be able to sit in judgment upon ourselves. May we be able to go searching to the very bottom of our lives, that we may know where we stand. May we know whether our religious feelings are mere accomplishments, or whether they are the marrow and the discerning power of our lives. May we know where our nature hinges; where the whole force of our being is most found; and may we look to it ourselves, since it can concern none as it does us. Grant that we may look faithfully, each one for himself, into our own characters, as we stand before God. And may we every one hear the voice of God, believe on him, repent, change, so that we shall pass from death unto life, and be no longer the enemies of God and righteousness, but become thy dear children. Help, O Jesus, help, O Holy Spirit, help, O pitying Father—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—help every one that without thee cannot rise and come into thy kingdom. And to thy name shall be the praise forever and ever. *Amen.*

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